

*Written for a screening of Eros and Wonder organized by Collectif jeune cinema.*

*Eros and Wonder* is a film about transformations – about transformations of imagery, about history as transformation, about eros as a transformative power, about that old Eisensteinian idea of collage and montage as transformation, but most of all, about the transformations of the self. The film combines two sorts of transformations – electrical transformations, produced by digital image processing, and chemical transformations, produced by processing the film by hand, in small batches. Thus, it is a dialogue between two technologies, the older chemical/mechanical technology of the era that gave birth to the cinema, and the new electronic/digital computing technology more commonly associated with video – a dialogue between what was and what is yet to be.

But in the end, the transformation that is most sought for is that which occurs to the self through overcoming wilfulness. *Eros and Wonder* is a quest, through ecstasy, for serenity. I had developed concerns about artistic methods that put the artist's will at their centre and had found many reasons for avoiding authorial imposition and 'egocentric' making. Like the composer and aesthetician John Cage, I have come to believe that, not the isolated self, but the greater order of nature should be the work's maker and that the creative process should imitate nature in its manner of operation. Accordingly, like Cage, I have strived to find creative methods that would accord nature a role in shaping the work. For Cage, chance operations figure among the methods that achieve this goal of selfless making. The richness of Cage's writing convinced me aleatory techniques can change the relation between the work and its maker for the better; the rigour of writings by Iannis Xenakis and James Tenney on stochastic methods and the strength of their musical compositions re-enforced this influence.

Chance operations of two types appear in *Eros and Wonder*: First, aleatory – and seemingly Brownian – effects are produced by processing the film by hand, in small batches, using non-standard methods, chemicals and temperatures. Because the chemicals are applied by hand, not by machine, the effects of the chemicals fluctuate, and sometimes interfere with our ability to discern the underlying images. But if I have done my job well, and the images behind these surface fluctuations and surface abrasions have visual interest, then that interference seems just a little bit sad – in much the same way that it is sad that surfaces often become more appealing as they become more decrepit. When I process film by hand, I cannot predict exactly what the effects of chemicals will be; however, my experience with hand-processing gives one an inkling of what the results will be – that allows me to collaborate with the natural forces that create the result.

A second way of introducing aleatory operations into this work was to let constrained random processes decide nature of the electronic transformations of the images. I did this using computer software that I wrote for the purpose. I constructed a digital tool that imitates my way of working – and extends it, by eliminating subjective whim. This program allows me to collaborate with the machine (which, of course, is ultimately nature at large, or, at least, the laws of physics) to produce "visual compositions."

Another way that Cage's work has influenced me was in the idea of making experience of time as duration central. Most lyrical writers/filmmakers focus on the experience of time as rhythm. The experience of time as duration is quite different – but it can open one towards the experience of emptiness that so many religious and spiritual traditions have celebrated. Cage frequently collaborated with the choreographer Merce Cunningham, and when they worked on a piece, they would not try to create correspondences between gestures in the dance and the sound. The performance was a time-frame, a duration, which each of them – after reaching an agreement on certain factors – would fill in his separate way: Cage would compose the music, Cunningham would choreograph the dance.

This way of combining the two separate arts (music, i.e., organized sound and choreography, i.e., organized body movements) extended the use of chance operation of a larger frame. I decided to use an analogous principle in composing this work. A poem I wrote provides a basic framework for *Eros and Wonder*'s sound and image: the composers who worked with me on the film produced the sound track (that comprises electronically generated sound – electronic sounds whose qualities were decided by attributes of the poem that structures *Eros and Wonder* – sounds produced through computer voice synthesis, and passages of Romantic music that were written in the German towns that one sees in the film) as an autonomous, self-standing object. The sound and picture were combined only when the film is printed, and the relations between them were not wilfully constructed.